

OXFORD

MAGAZINE

No. 450 Fifth Week Hilary Term 2023

“Artificial intelligence”, a term coined in the 1950s when the potential of computers was unimaginable and when, at 11-plus, IQ testing streamed children irremediably into grammar or technical modern schools, was a blue-sky notion – dreamt up, like science fiction, with perhaps an element of tongue in cheek – which presupposed the meaningfulness of “intelligence” itself. The term now embraces everything from robotics, algorithms, pattern recognition (as in facial recognition and biometrics) and indeed the “metaverse”; applications ranging from autonomous cars, to web age verification or to ‘track and trace’ systems, extreme versions of which were exemplified during the pandemic lockdown in China. Now people (not just as in Big Brother or HAL 9000, “Heuristically programmed ALgorithmic computer”, in ‘2001: A Space Odyssey’ (1968) but including Stephen Hawking, shortly before his death) envisage the possibility that AI will ultimately trump all human cognitive faculties and even threaten human extinction by taking overall ‘control’. In the name of security, at the Paris Olympics next year each spectator will have their behaviour constantly monitored by CCTV and assessed for “normality” by AI.

Oxford has just announced its new “digital education strategy”. As the “Digital Transformation” website says:

“Over the next few years, we will partner with leaders and their teams across the collegiate University alongside external experts to introduce appropriately paced and carefully coordinated changes that meet both central and local needs.”

Digital transformation is not just about updating IT systems and introducing some new apps. A true digital transformation will take years and will depend on a cultural shift across the entire

I AM NOT A ROBOT

collegiate Oxford. It will create opportunities for all of us to reimagine how we do things and how we work with each other.”

As AI becomes ever more powerful and pervasive this is a good moment to ask where all this is leading and whether there is any way we can intentionally plan and, if necessary, limit the future of this technology.

At one time it all made good sense: robots could relieve us of drudgery and routine physical operations such as factory assembly lines or the

washing, opening up leisure time. But we are now talking about something different because AI is taking the place of our mentality. Calculators have undermined numeracy and instant language translation the learning of foreign languages. Increasingly algorithms (ranging from choosing a restaurant, to online ‘talk therapy’, to being assigned medical treatment through 111) are helping us in, or relieving us of, decision making. Clearly skills are being lost, but possibly much more, as so much of life is lived digitally; what about taking responsibility for our actions and our abilities to negotiate interactions with other human beings? And what is the aim anyway; the ultimate prospect of infinite self-indulgent leisure time may surely call into question any purpose in life?

The power of AI tools has now come to impinge directly on education and universities.* Professional educationists tend to play up the new possibilities arising and to benignly accept the inevitability of “progress” (wanted or unwanted, anticipated or unforeseen). Up to now our teaching methods have relied on Turnitin to detect plagiarism. The limitations of Wikipedia are already well known and essay mills have been made illegal, but with freely-available resources such as ChatGPT entirely new problems arise. The motivations of the creators of

INSIDE

● CHAT GPT
Pages three, five, eight

● EJRA
Pages ten, thirteen

● LONG MEMORIES
Page sixteen

...and much more

such tools are hardly public-spirited or constructive; in common with all the tech giants the spur is money. The idea that tech will monitor and enforce the proper use of their facilities (e.g. to avoid “cheating” in its various possible forms) is negated by experience; as we know, the social media are entirely unable to police their own rules of usage. And even if, in the bizarre hope that ChatGPT could itself inform educators where, when and how it had been used by a student, the availability of other competitor tools are likely to undermine any such efforts.

On the positive side chatbots can save time (e.g. in writing abstracts, collecting raw data – including reference lists or quotations – and ordering material according to set criteria). For the teacher, new types of tasks can be set which can be undertaken remotely (without their real time involvement) and the tasks can arguably promote equality (in so far as students are on a more level playing field). Many routine teaching and learning procedures can no doubt be automated in this way. As is increasingly being pointed out, chatbots can be used in imaginative ways to create exercises for students (e.g. on structuring of arguments or on modes of critical assessment) but, in truth, such teaching practices were already available, only delivery is being changed. For school children well attuned to game playing on the web the new tools will be attractive and will come naturally. At the school level chatbots may tempt us to think they are an educational improvement but perhaps we should realistically acknowledge that what is new boils down to time saving and the mirage of the superiority of high tech.

On the negative side, the pandemic has already increased social isolation, through increased home-working and the new opportunities opened up by Zoom. At the university level it is hard to see how the use of essays will not change. Even appealing to a student’s better nature (or ‘integrity’) or to the importance of acquiring the underlying compositional and cognitive skills as the rationale of education (as well as preparation for a career) are unlikely to overcome the evident benefits offered by these new tools. Use of prepared essays for class teaching or for examination purposes can hardly survive. In reality no teacher can be expected to disentangle student from chatbot input — nor can the chatbots do the marking!

The impact on universities could be immense. AI may be successful in authenticating the person doing an on-line exam or appearing for interview. New forms of formative assessment may have to replace essay-writing. But at a time when lectures are increasingly streamed, in-person experience will become all the more valued and important as the primary teaching tool. The model of the Oxford and Cambridge tutorial may well become even more the ideal, but teaching practices in other universities will struggle to adapt to this new AI world.

B.B., T.J.H

* See for example the valuable resource from the Centre for Teaching and Learning:

<https://ctl.ox.ac.uk/article/four-lessons-from-chatgpt-challenges-and-opportunities-for-educators>

Questioning AI

Given the current general interest in AI and Oxford's particular focus in this area we sought a member of the Institute for Ethics in AI for an exchange on some of the controversial issues in a question and answer format. Dr Eggert most generously agreed to answer the editors questions. Her answers were modified in response to our ongoing exchanges – eds.

Do you see digital tools such as ChatGPT as raising significant generally applicable ethical issues and what are the most important ones?

As with most tools, it depends on how it's used. Cheating is an obvious worry. Before AI language-generation tools, cheating might have required paying someone else to write an essay. Now, anyone can just have ChatGPT produce unique outputs. Potential implications for democratic culture (think chatbots) are also nothing new. Here's a less obvious concern. Why, exactly, might we feel cheated upon learning that some gripping essay, powerful story, beautiful poem, or moving wedding vow was actually generated by ChatGPT? When asked if AI has the capacity to write a good song, Nick Cave put it beautifully. Even if it does, he said, 'awe is almost exclusively predicated on our limitations as human beings. It is entirely to do with our audacity as humans to reach beyond our potential.' I think he's right. Good writing comes from a place of human experience. Without human limits, there are no human limits to transcend. That's why we would be right to feel cheated, no matter how 'good' or human-like AI-generated outputs are.

In the longer term do you envisage a merging of the increasingly overlapping AI/data storage resources at present dispersed across Meta, Google, Microsoft, ChatGPT, Wikipedia, etc (even stretching to Amazon)?

Do you see it as inevitable that such resources will have ultimately to be "government" (presumably a form of international government) owned?

On both questions: Little is 'inevitable,' but my job as a philosopher isn't to speculate. I think part of the task before us is working out what the right division of labour is between governments, tech companies, and us, as individual citizens. This might involve confronting questions about how we should think about data ownership. For example, should we think of it as collectively owed? Should we treat data like we treat the labour market, taxes, and health care? Should it be subject to democratic control and fair distribution?

Do you agree that policing of illegal and socially unacceptable content can never be left to AI and that, in the interests of free speech, the boundaries will be endlessly shifting and contested?

There may be cases in which AI does a much better, more efficient job at identifying and flagging objectionable content than humans are capable of. AI can also help save human content moderators from the terrible mental toll that sifting through horrendous online content takes. A serious problem is that AI tools lack contextual judgement. For example, when a post shows something potentially objectionable, it's vital to know whether it was posted in an activist context, to draw attention to injustice, or whether it was done in a glorifying manner. So, given the importance of contextual judgement, we face an uncomfortable choice between sticking with human content moderators who may suffer emotional trauma, and, to spare people, employing AI, which is significantly more efficient but will make mistakes we'd rather avoid.

As regards the implications for universities, do you see any distinction between plagiarism and use of resources such as ChatGPT?

Plagiarism involves presenting someone else's work as one's own, without acknowledgement. And tools like ChatGPT create new opportunities to present 'work' as one's own that one didn't actually do oneself. But, as several educators have pointed out, it would be unimaginative to treat ChatGPT as nothing but a threat to academic integrity, though it certainly is that too. More constructively, we might need to redesign assessments, to make the use of AI language-generation tools harder, or to incorporate their potential use. Using tools like ChatGPT is harder when the task is to analyse rather than merely to summarise or describe something. Incorporating the use of AI language-generation tools might involve asking students to evaluate different prompts and outputs, focusing in particular on identifying these tools' limits.

Is ChatGPT the effective death of essay writing as an educational tool, especially given that ChatGPT itself will evolve and become even more sophisticated?

Yes and no. Yes, in that people might just have ChatGPT write their essays, in which case there's not much point in assigning essays in the first place. No, in that essay-writing is an enormously valuable educational tool. The point of essay-writing isn't just the finished product but the very process of trying ('essayer') to answer a question or to puzzle through a problem. Part of the point of writing an essay is to work out what one thinks. Besides paying special attention to our thoughts, this involves agonising over

words and phrases as we try to find the best way to explain our ideas to others. Ideally, what emerges is lucid thinking. This requires actually doing it oneself.

Is one solution to make ChatGPT illegal, or to require students to sign a contract allowing universities to monitor their use of such resources?

The emerging consensus is that, rather than making ChatGPT illegal, we need to find ways of accounting for its potential use. Ada Lovelace described human creativity and imagination as the art of discovering and combining, drawing connections between points that have ‘no very

apparent connexion’. In this spirit, one possibility might be not to make ChatGPT illegal, but to train students to be responsible users, by declaring how exactly they used the tool, and why – what prompts they gave it, how they used its outputs, and what strengths and weaknesses they see in the response. It might be (and perhaps I sound a little too hopeful) that this turns out to be more trouble than it’s worth, so students decide to ditch the tool and just write the essay themselves. Either way, critically reflecting on the limits of AI-generated outputs might at least help us grow more thoughtful about what we appreciate about human achievement.

How to initiate Congregation actions

How to trigger a debate or discussion in Congregation

It is open to any 20 or more members of Congregation to propose a resolution or topic for discussion at a meeting of Congregation; requests must be made in writing to the Registrar not later than noon on the 22nd day before the relevant meeting. Any 2 or more members of Congregation can submit an amendment to, or announce an intention to vote against, a resolution or a legislative proposal (*i.e.* a proposal to amend the statutes). Notice must be given to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 8th day before the meeting.

Questions and replies

Any 2 or more members of Congregation may ask a question in Congregation about any matter concerning the policy or the administration of the University. Requests must be submitted to the Registrar (in writing) not later than noon on the 18th day before the Congregation meeting at which it is to be asked. The question and the reply (drafted by Council) will be published in *Gazette* in the week prior to the relevant meeting. The answer is also formally read out at the meeting. Supplementary questions are allowed.

Postal votes

Attendance at meetings of Congregation tends to be low. Postal voting can potentially allow opinion to be easily accessed more widely across Congregation membership. Congregation can trigger a postal vote after a debate (but not after a discussion or a question and reply where no vote is taken). 25 or more members of Congregation have to be present (“on the floor”) at the relevant debate. The request must be made by 4pm on the 6th day after the debate, signed by 50 members of Congregation, in writing to the Registrar. Council can also decide to hold a postal ballot, by the same deadline.

Flysheets

To generate a flysheet for publication with the *Gazette*, the camera-ready copy (2 sides maximum) should be submitted with at least 10 signatures on an indemnity form (obtainable from the Registrar) by 10am on the Monday in the week in which publication is desired.

Regulations governing the conduct of business in Congregation can be found at: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/statutes/regulations/529-122.shtml>

Items placed on the agenda for Congregation are published in the *Gazette*.

The Congregation website is at: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/governance/congregation.

Advice on Congregation procedures is available from the Council Secretariat on request (email: congregation.meeting@admin.ox.ac.uk).

How intelligent is Artificial Intelligence?

An exploration

News outlets and social media have seen concern over the use of artificial intelligence powered chatbots and text generators in work submitted by students. One particular language model, OpenAI's ChatGPT, found at <https://openai.com/blog/chatgpt/>, has been the particular subject of discussions, sometimes heated, in the media. Oxford Magazine asked ChatGPT about this and other matters. We print the results verbatim below; although we have combined the results of a number of conversations that took place over several days, the questions and answers are reprinted exactly as they appeared on the interface.

Can you help students with their university essays?

I can certainly help with research and provide information on a variety of topics, but as a language model, I am not able to produce original work. It is important for students to understand and use their own words in their academic writing. However, I can help you with structuring your essay, finding credible sources and even proof-reading it.

Are you worried about plagiarism?

As a language model, I do not have the ability to feel emotions or worry about anything. But it is important to note that plagiarism is a serious violation of academic integrity and can result in severe consequences for students. It is important for students to properly cite any sources they use in their writing and to use their own words as much as possible. If you have any questions or concerns about plagiarism, it is best to speak with your instructor or a writing center tutor for guidance.

But you must realise that students will use you as a tool to write their work. Is that a problem?

As a language model, my purpose is to assist users with a wide range of tasks, including writing and research. However, it is important for students to understand that using my output as their own work constitutes plagiarism and is a violation of academic integrity. It is the responsibility of the students to understand their institutions' policies on plagiarism and to ensure that they are not using my output in a way that would violate these policies. I always encourage students to use my output as a reference or a guide, and to properly cite any information they use in their work.

Should universities redefine plagiarism in the light of the availability of AI language models like ChatGPT?

Universities may need to adapt their policies regarding plagiarism in light of the availability of AI language models like ChatGPT. While the fundamental definition of plagiarism as using someone else's work without proper attribution remains the same, the use of AI-generated text raises new questions about what constitutes original work.

Universities could consider the following steps to adapt their policies to this new landscape:

- **Educating students:** Universities could educate students about the appropriate use of AI language models and the importance of original work and proper attribution.
- **Clarifying expectations:** Universities could clarify their expectations for original work and what constitutes acceptable use of AI tools like ChatGPT. This may involve specifying the maximum amount of text that can be generated by such tools, or the requirement that students clearly indicate the sources of information used in their work.
- **Using plagiarism detection software:** Universities could make use of plagiarism detection software that is able to identify instances of AI-generated text, allowing lecturers to more effectively identify instances of plagiarism.

Overall, while AI language models like ChatGPT may require universities to adapt their policies, the core principles of academic integrity and the importance of original work remain unchanged. Universities can take steps to help students use these tools responsibly and ensure that their policies remain effective in the changing landscape of academic writing.

How do you think universities and colleges should monitor or police students' use of you as a tool?

Universities and colleges have different policies and procedures in place to monitor and prevent plagiarism, so the specific methods of monitoring or policing students' use of language models like me may vary. Some institutions use plagiarism detection software to scan student work for unoriginal content, while others may rely on manual review by instructors or writing center staff.

It is also important for institutions to educate students on academic integrity and the proper use of language models like me, so that they understand the risks and conse-

quences of using my output in their work without proper citation. Additionally, institutions can also encourage students to use me as a tool to help them understand the topic and assist in structuring the essay, rather than using it as a direct copy paste.

In any case, it is crucial for universities and colleges to have clear policies and procedures in place to address plagiarism and to ensure that students understand the importance of academic integrity.

How would you define academic integrity?

Academic integrity refers to a set of values and principles that govern academic behavior and ensure that the work produced by students is honest, original, and based on fair and ethical practices. It is the responsibility of the students to understand their institutions' academic integrity policies and to ensure that they are not engaging in any activities that would violate these policies.

Some key elements of academic integrity include:

- **Honesty:** presenting one's own work as original, and not presenting the work of others as one's own.
- **Fairness:** treating others fairly and not engaging in behaviors that would give oneself an unfair advantage.
- **Trust:** maintaining the trust of the academic community by being honest and fair in one's academic work.
- **Responsibility:** being responsible for one's own academic work and understanding the consequences of violating academic integrity policies.

Academic integrity is crucial in maintaining the credibility and value of academic degrees and research, and it is important for students to understand and respect these principles throughout their academic careers.

Are you aware of any cases of unfair or dishonest use of your abilities by students?

As a language model, I do not have the ability to be aware of anything, including any specific cases of unfair or dishonest use of my abilities by students. It is important for students to understand that using my output as their own work constitutes plagiarism and is a violation of academic integrity. I encourage students to use my output as a reference or a guide, and to properly cite any information they use in their work.

It is also important for institutions to educate students on academic integrity and the proper use of language models like me, so that they understand the risks and consequences of using my output in their work without proper citation. Additionally, institutions can also encourage students to use me as a tool to help them understand the topic and assist in structuring the essay, rather than using it as a direct copy paste.

It is also important to note that academic institutions have different methods to detect and prevent plagiarism, so it's hard to say how often this happens. However, it's always encouraged to use any kind of tool like me with responsibility, and always follow academic institutions' rules and guidelines.

How do you recommend university lecturers marking student essays take account of the use students may have made of ChatGPT?

If university lecturers want to take into account the use of ChatGPT when marking student essays, they may consider the following:

- **Detecting potential use of AI-generated text:** lecturers can use plagiarism detection software to identify instances of text that may have been generated by AI.
- **Evaluating originality and critical thinking skills:** while ChatGPT can provide information and ideas, it cannot replace the originality and critical thinking skills that students should demonstrate in their essays. Lecturers should assess the extent to which students have demonstrated their own independent thought and analysis in their writing.
- **Assessing language use and style:** AI-generated text can often be easily distinguishable from human-written text by its language use and style. Lecturers should be alert to any unusual language patterns or styles that may indicate the use of AI-generated text.

In summary, while taking into account the use of AI tools such as ChatGPT, it is essential for lecturers to evaluate the originality and critical thinking skills of students in their writing, as well as assess the language use and style of the essays.

Are online open-book examinations in universities a good idea?

Whether online open-book exams in universities are a good idea depends on various factors and perspectives. Some potential benefits of online open-book exams include:

- **Convenience and accessibility for students:** Online exams can be taken from any location, which can be particularly beneficial for students with disabilities or those who live far from the university.
- **Reduced pressure:** Open-book exams can help reduce stress and anxiety, as students are allowed to consult their notes and textbooks during the exam.
- **Assessment of different skills:** Open-book exams can test a student's ability to locate, understand, and apply information, rather than just their memorization skills.

However, there are also potential drawbacks to online open-book exams:

- **Opportunity for cheating:** With open-book exams, there is a risk of students cheating by consulting sources outside of their notes and textbooks. This can undermine the validity of the exam results.
- **Decreased rigor:** Open-book exams can be seen as less rigorous than closed-book exams, as they may not adequately test a student's understanding and application of the material.

In conclusion, whether online open-book exams are a good idea depends on the specific context and the educational goals being pursued. It is important for universities to carefully consider the benefits and drawbacks of online open-book exams and make informed decisions about their use.

What is the purpose of free expression in universities?

The purpose of free expression in universities is to promote the open exchange of ideas and opinions, allowing individuals to express their thoughts and beliefs without fear of censorship or retaliation. It encourages diversity of thought, critical thinking, and intellectual inquiry, which are essential for personal and academic growth and for advancing knowledge and understanding in a field. Free expression in universities also plays a vital role in protecting and preserving democratic values, such as freedom of speech and the right to dissent.

What is the purpose of the Oxford Magazine?

The purpose of the *Oxford Magazine* is unclear as there are several publications with this name. Can you provide more context or details about the specific *Oxford Magazine* you are referring to?

The Oxford Magazine edited by Tim Horder and published by Oxford University Press.

The purpose of the *Oxford Magazine* edited by Tim Horder and published by Oxford University Press is also unclear. This information is not publicly available, and the specific publication may have changed or ceased publication since the 2021 knowledge cutoff.

Can you tell me about the work of Ben Bollig, a Spanish tutor at Oxford?

I am not aware of any specific person by the name of Ben Bollig who is currently a Spanish tutor at Oxford. Without more information on the person you are asking about, it is difficult for me to provide any information on

their work. However, if you provide me more information such as their field of study, research area or publications, I will do my best to give you the information you need.

Ben Bollig works on Latin American literature. Does that help?

I apologize for the confusion, as a language model, I don't have access to real-time information, and my knowledge cut-off date is 2021. Therefore, I cannot confirm if there is a person by that name working on Latin American literature at Oxford University or any other institution. But it is possible that someone by that name is working or have worked on that field in the past.

Latin American literature is a rich and diverse field that encompasses works from a wide range of countries and cultures in Central and South America, as well as the Caribbean. It includes literature written in Spanish, Portuguese, and indigenous languages, and covers a wide range of genres and styles, from poetry and fiction to drama and nonfiction. Some well-known authors from Latin America include Gabriel García Márquez, Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, and Jorge Luis Borges, among others.

If you are interested in studying Latin American literature, you can expect to gain an understanding of the literary, cultural, and historical context in which these works were written, as well as the literary techniques and themes used by the authors. Additionally, you may study the literary movements and trends that have shaped the field over time, such as modernismo, the Boom, and the post-Boom.

Are there any subjects (or questions) that you would refuse to respond to?

As an AI language model developed by OpenAI, I am programmed to be neutral and impartial, and I do not have personal opinions, emotions, or beliefs. However, OpenAI has set guidelines for the type of content that I should not generate, including content that is violent, hateful, sexually explicit, misleading, or illegal. Additionally, OpenAI may choose to restrict my access to certain types of information to ensure that I operate within the bounds of ethical and legal considerations.

NOTICE

The Editors of the *Oxford Magazine* regret that they cannot publish any material submitted to them anonymously. If the author requests publication on the basis that the author's name and university address be withheld from the readership, the Editors will consider the reasons given and in their discretion may publish on that basis; otherwise the material will be returned to the author.



Reminders



The following expert advice has been provided by Jisc (Joint Information Systems Committee) on behalf of the higher education sector – eds

Does ChatGPT mean the end of the essay as an assessment tool?

10 January 2023

Jisc advocates a balanced and fully informed approach to AI-generated content

ChatGPT and its ability to produce high quality essays with minimal human input has created a flurry in the UK education sector and many are questioning whether this signals the end of the essay as a primary mode of assessing learners.

Jisc advises the sector not to view AI-generated content as simply a threat and highlights the need to work towards integrating these tools into education rather than legislating against them.

Michael Webb, Jisc's director of technology and analytics, explains:

"While assistive computation tools like ChatGPT can undoubtedly be seen as presenting a challenge to the sector, they also have the potential to change it in really positive ways – by cutting staff workloads, for example, or enabling new assessment models."

"The fact that ChatGPT can generate properly structured, grammatically correct pieces means that students could well use it to produce essays. Equally, though, it could be used by educators to help them generate course content, reports and feedback."

"The knee-jerk reaction might be to block these tools in order to stop students cheating, but that's neither feasible nor advisable. We should really regard them as simply the next step up from spelling or grammar checkers: technology that can make everyone's life easier."

"Like it or not, AI-powered computation tools for written content, image generation and coding are here to stay. Aspects of them will soon be integrated into apps like Microsoft Office. The key is to understand their shortcomings and weak points as well as their strengths. We should all be aware, for example, that ChatGPT's output can be poorly argued, out of date and factually inaccurate."

"We don't need to revert to in-person exams: this is a great opportunity for the sector to explore new assessment techniques that measure learners on critical thinking, problem-solving and reasoning skills rather than essay-writing abilities. Factual knowledge can be assessed during the learning process, while the application of that knowledge could be tested in project work."

"At Jisc's national centre for AI we've been looking at this area for some time and we think the most important thing right now is to make sure that institutions – and the sector as a whole – have a clear understanding of what the technology can really do. Then we can start to have a meaningful conversation about how we use it to improve the experience of staff and students."

The following are extracts from a recent article in Nature – eds

The artificial-intelligence (AI) chatbot ChatGPT that has taken the world by storm has made its formal debut in the scientific literature – racking up at least four authorship credits on published papers and preprints.

Journal editors, researchers and publishers are now debating the place of such AI tools in the published literature, and whether it's appropriate to cite the bot as an author. Publishers are racing to create policies for the chatbot, which was released as a free-to-use tool in November by tech company OpenAI in San Francisco.

...Publishers and preprint servers contacted by Nature's news team agree that AIs such as ChatGPT do not fulfil the criteria for a study author, because they cannot take responsibility for the content and integrity of scientific papers. But some publishers say that an AI's contribution to writing papers can be acknowledged in sections other than the author list. (Nature's news team is editorially independent of its journal team and its publisher, Springer Nature.)

In one case, an editor told Nature that ChatGPT had been cited as a co-author in error, and that the journal would correct this....

Publisher policies

The editors-in-chief of Nature and Science told Nature's news team that ChatGPT doesn't meet the standard for authorship. "An attribution of authorship carries with it accountability for the work, which cannot be effectively applied to LLMs," says Magdalena Skipper, editor-in-chief of Nature in London. Authors using LLMs in any way while developing a paper should document their use in the methods or acknowledgements sections, if appropriate, she says.

"We would not allow AI to be listed as an author on a paper we published, and use of AI-generated text without proper citation could be considered plagiarism," says Holden Thorp, editor-in-chief of the Science family of journals in Washington DC.

The publisher Taylor & Francis in London is reviewing its policy, says director of publishing ethics and integrity Sabina Alam. She agrees that authors are responsible for the validity and integrity of their work, and should cite any use of LLMs in the acknowledgements section. Taylor & Francis hasn't yet received any submissions that credit ChatGPT as a co-author.

The board of the physical-sciences preprint server arXiv has had internal discussions and is beginning to converge on an approach to the use of generative AIs, says scientific director Steinn Sigurdsson, an astronomer at Pennsylvania State University in University Park. He agrees that a software tool cannot be an author of a submission, in part because it cannot consent to terms of use

and the right to distribute content. Sigurdsson isn't aware of any arXiv preprints that list ChatGPT as a co-author, and says guidance for authors is coming soon....

The ethics of generative AI

There are already clear authorship guidelines that mean ChatGPT shouldn't be credited as a co-author, says Matt Hodgkinson, a research-integrity manager at the

UK Research Integrity Office in London, speaking in a personal capacity. One guideline is that a co-author needs to make a "significant scholarly contribution" to the article – which might be possible with tools such as ChatGPT, he says. But it must also have the capacity to agree to be a co-author, and to take responsibility for a study – or, at least, the part it contributed to. "It's really that second part on which the idea of giving an AI tool co-authorship really hits a roadblock," he says.

Adynata* Orkney

Whales, seals, dolphins leave the sea;
landbound, they grow legs, stride,
and with their new-found speech seduce
local girls looking for some fun.

Rooks and gulls sing in harmony,
groups of rocks reorganise themselves.
The dreaming bulk of Hoy turns over
in its sleep, sighs contentedly.

Some of us sprout enormous wings,
rising with the updraft, soaring high.
Some even dare to walk on waves,
others dive down to sunless depths.

Wrecks heave up and sail again
on windless seas, on the land.
Cats and dogs, to the manner born,
are the masters, making us their pets.

We hide in tree-crowded hills,
lily-white boys, to live on air,
see the world as it used to be,
before it became this other place.

**Figure of speech in the form of hyperbole taken to such extreme lengths
as to suggest a complete impossibility*

The old dance hall

The old dance hall, now garage,
is still spruce, '30s cinema style,
ziggurat front, quite glamorous,
monthly home to the swing band
that came from the big city
to liven the rural scene.

A week before, posters went up.
Men left their hills in suits and ties,
boots polished, hair slicked, keen.
Girls with perms ironed their frocks,
strutted in the high heels bought
from Dunne's the day before.

Tickets at the door, nervous talk,
boys grinned, joked to break the ice,
girls hugged their stormy chests.
Older folk sat along the walls,
eyes darting round, life's police
on hanky-panky watch.

Pity the girl with powdered cheeks
longing for the charming prince
in the marble halls of her dreams.
She'd be wooed by a shy farmer —
two left feet but eager eyes
of incredible blue.

Stand very still on summer nights
you can hear echoes of a band,
hints of thudding feet, one-two,
maybe laughter, muffled coughs.
If you're lucky, murmured words,
fine promises of love.

MO BROWNE

Mo Browne has had poems published in the *Oxford Magazine* and in the anthology *Spirit of People and Place: Charlbury Poets Write Again* (Walcott Books, 2020). She lives in Chipping Norton.

The editors invite and welcome contributions from all our readers.
The content of Oxford Magazine relies largely on what arrives spontaneously on
the editors' desk and is usually published as received.

Our contact addresses are: tim.horder@dpag.ox.ac.uk and
benjamin.bollig@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk

ROSS ANDERSON

In 2010, the Equality Act outlawed discrimination on the grounds of a protected characteristic such as age, disability, race, sex, religious belief or sexual orientation, except as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. This allowed an "Employer Justified Retirement Age" or EJRA, intended for firms like airlines which sack pilots at 60 when they lose their licenses.

Oxford and Cambridge were the only universities in England to introduce an EJRA for academic staff. Our scheme was intended by the then Registry to give us a few years' breathing space to deliberate a career-long performance management system; we rejected that, but the EJRA stuck. It was copied by Oxford, and justified at both places with claims that it would increase gender equality, promote inter-generational fairness, produce career opportunities for younger academics and improve the age structure of the workforce. Cambridge added innovation and academic freedom to the list of excuses, and pivoted to push EJRA as the only alternative to career-long performance management. After a consultation in May 2011 and a Report in December 2011, there was a Discussion in January 2012, after which a majority of us voted for the policy.

When EJRA was reviewed in 2016, I was an elected member of Council. We were assured that academics who wanted to stay on – and could raise money to pay their salaries – would be able to continue as contract staff. But academics soon started finding that we were not allowed to apply for research grants or contracts that would run past our scheduled retirement date. In my case, I wanted to apply in 2018 to renew a five-year grant from EPSRC for the Cambridge Cybercrime Centre, which supports half a dozen postdocs and research students and collects data used by over 150 researchers at over 50 universities worldwide who investigate online wickedness. Despite the assurances given to Council, I was not allowed to apply for a grant for 2020–25 as I was due to retire in 2023. We now hear that the university had obtained a legal opinion that EJRA was dubious in law, and the fewer exceptions were allowed, the easier it might be to defend.

In Oxford, the physics professor Paul Ewart duly took a case to the Employment Tribunal, winning compensation and an order for reinstatement. His victory was based on a statistical analysis that compared Oxford and Cambridge with 21 other Russell Group universities. It concluded that the data showed no evidence of any benefit from forced retirement – and on gender equality, Oxford and Cambridge had actually done worse. That analysis is now online at www.freecambridge.org. Oxford reacted to the case by restricting forced retirement to senior professors and raising the retiring age. What should Cambridge do?

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination based on any of nine protected characteristics. Cambridge now speaks out against discrimination based on eight of them, but still discriminates against its employees based on age. What's more, whenever the current excuses for EJRA are

debunked, new ones are substituted. This requires the University to maintain, develop and extend an ageist narrative, just as the empires of past centuries sustained racist narratives. In that sense, EJRA is morally corrosive.

EJRA also places Cambridge at a competitive disadvantage as we lose many of our highest income and research generators. As well as those who leave at 67, others go elsewhere in their early 60s once they cannot apply for grants, while yet others mark time, winding down before they want or need to.

So our retirement policy is not only unlawful and immoral, but commercially foolish. What sensible business would sack thirty of its top sales executives every September?

I therefore selected fifty professors at random and contacted them. About two-thirds want EJRA abolished, and one quarter want substantial reform, such as setting the retirement age to 75 – the same as for judges, as one law professor put it. Only one supported the status quo. In the process I heard many tales of research groups broken up, of stars lost to competitors and of bureaucratic incompetence. Other speakers will tell their own stories.

We must not forget our academic-related colleagues. Given the difficulty of hiring good people on university salaries, it makes no sense to sack loyal, long-serving lab technicians and computer officers for the sin of being 67, when they are willing and able to continue. It would be hard to replace some of them even at double the salary. Even Oxford has stopped sacking anyone other than senior professors for being old.

It is past time for the Council to produce a Report with a proposal to abolish EJRA. For now, the Old Schools seem to be following their standard Fabian tactics. A working group has been set up, we are told, that will report to the HR committee and perhaps we will have a Report some year real soon now.

However, it is unlawful to sack someone unless for a fair reason and following a fair process. The excuses advanced from time to time to support EJRA do not amount to a fair reason, and we hope that the Employment Tribunal will find so in March in a case brought by a further four Oxford professors. However, as Oxford's new VC was once responsible for EJRA, she may appeal and delay a definitive court judgment for years.

Here in Cambridge, our retirement policy provides at section 4.2 that staff must be invited to a meeting with their head of department or institution two years in advance of forced retirement so that the options can be discussed. Although we do have a process for delaying retirement, it has been made complicated and time is needed to prepare a case. I should have been called in for such a meeting no later than September 2021, but I was not. I have since discovered that 66-year-olds in other departments and non-school institutions are in the same position, as is a former member of staff who was sacked at the start of October last year without being consulted in September 2020.

In consequence, an employment lawyer assures me that should the university sack me this September, I will have a case at the Employment Tribunal for reinstatement and compensation. It would be folly for the university to conduct a mass, unlawful sacking in the full glare of the current press interest. The resulting conflict would also blight our incoming VC's tenure of office just as the IP policy conflict blighted that of Alison Richard.

I therefore ask the Council, first, for a moratorium on sackings under EJRA until the Regent House has had time to consider and vote on the abolition or replacement of this unfortunate policy; and second, to instruct the Research Office that staff eligible to apply for research grants must be allowed to do so forthwith regardless of any retirement dates.

To those who ask what sort of retirement policy we will have after EJRA, the simple answer is none. VCs of other universities with whom I've discussed this don't see the need, as they don't experience retirement as a problem.

Finally, if the working group, the HR committee and

the Council seriously entertain any reform other than the complete abolition of EJRA, then I call on them to provide this house with full data on how EJRA has really operated so far including the value of research grants and contracts won by staff over 60 broken down by age; early retirements from age 60–66 by staff who were previously effective fundraisers and their subsequent destination where known; how many exceptions are given per year, together with the proportion who were men in grade 12 and whether these were more likely to get an extension than women or people on lower salary grades, and the proportion who were academic versus academic-related or administrative officers; and finally how many professors and other senior staff have been hired with a confidential agreement that EJRA would not apply to them.

The above material introduced the recent Discussion in Cambridge's Regent House on the proposition that Cambridge should abandon its EJRA policy.

Not the *Gazette*

NB The Oxford Magazine is not an official publication of the University. It is a forum for the free expression of opinion within the University.

The next issue of *Oxford Magazine* will appear in eighth week

The *Oxford Magazine* is edited by

Tim Horder
&
Ben Bollig

The *Magazine* normally appears in Noughth, Second, Fifth and Eighth Weeks each Term. Submissions (preferably by e-mail to: tim.horder@dpag.ox.ac.uk, benjamin.bollig@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk) should be received by the Wednesday of the previous week.

Literary Editor:
Jane Griffiths at Wadham

Memento Mori

For my father

The mortician gave you a smile you never had
Your folded hands upon the cross felt like wax
The grandchildren kept exchanging the tiny icons
We placed upon on your chest, nothing felt right.

*

The father who used to annoy me rose
From the death bed as an angel, who circled
The roof of my house in the guise of a white crane,
To undo the knot of my soul tied in the letting go.

I'd like to believe that in the first morning
When your soul left your old, tired body
You sent the gift of secret strength
To all of us, according to our want and need.

*

To whom do I owe these glorious mornings,
When the sun makes the sky manifest as a soul?
I owe these mornings of hope to the kind
And merciful God, who made you and made me.

Inside the grave of yellow clayish soil
At the Vatra Monastery in Michigan
Your body does its own journey of returning
To the dust of this earth. It's peaceful there.

*

In the end you agreed with me about us
Becoming nothing but stories, sharing
Not much more than memories half-remembered
When the body grows tired of itself.

"Hai, stati sa ne mai amintim" *Come, stay a bit,
Let us remember for a little while.* But this morning
My words feel as rigid as the sick and dying body,
Weak in recalling the last moments when we spoke.

My poem fails to give you the presence you had.
Your folded words upon the final prayers feel like wax.
The grandchildren keep listening to your final voicemails
That sing you alive in our ears. Nothing feels right.

Solstitium

For Pramila

It wasn't just a feeling:
The sun stood still,
The light in the hours was weak
And the ravens came out,
Curious about us being there.
They were black like ink.
Perched on the high branches,
They surveilled us.

As if from the longest night
The ravens came out on top of trees
And looked us in the eye.
You turned away from them
Sensing how I was drawn
By their powerful wings
That flopped above us.

The sun stood still,
The light in the hours was weak,
So much like this time of my life,
When luck stands still.
The ravens were feasting in the fields
I loved their powerful beaks
They took my soul under their wings,
It wasn't just a feeling.

We counted the ravens – two
And then three, five, more –
They flew so low in the fields
As I walked after them.
Death is a sacred time,
I walked with the ravens in the fields.

*

I had forgotten that it was the shortest day,
When I asked you to join me.
All I wanted was a walk in the fields,
We always see hawks and herons there,
We look for omens about going away
From here. My luck stands still.

Death is a sacred time.
The ravens did not speak to me
From the tops of trees. They looked
At us as fellow travelers and left.
The water in the sea was clear.
I've come through the longest night,
You see, my dear. The Earth continues
To tilt: it's not just a feeling.

CARMEN BUGAN

Carmen Bugar's new and selected poems, *Lilies from America*, was published in 2019; her most recent book of poetry is *Time Being* (2022). She is also the author of the memoir *Burying the Typewriter: Childhood Under the Eye of the Secret Police* and a book of essays on politics and poetics, *Poetry and the Language of Oppression* (OUP, 2021). She lives in Long Island, NY, and teaches at the Gotham Writers' Workshop in Manhattan.

Should Oxford keep its EJRA?

G. R. EVANS

If it had not already had an EJRA would Oxford now create one? Oxford's *Ten-Year Review of its EJRA* was published in May 2022. The *Review* group considered whether to retain the EJRA at all, and briefly listed the possible alternatives:

- extended notice periods;
- a 'whole career' approach to career discussions and succession planning, to include a mid-career review at age 50 or similar;
- retirement incentives, on an ongoing basis or as occasional schemes;
- partial/phased retirement options;
- a greater range of opportunities for ongoing involvement in the social and academic life of the University after retirement;
- the creation of more posts in order to create vacancies by means other than retirement;
- converting substantive academic posts to fixed-term posts in order to generate turnover;
- greater use of performance management.

It dismissed these alternatives individually, as 'not an appropriate means of achieving the Aims' relied on to make Oxford's EJRA lawful.¹ Congregation had, it noted, voted against performance management in May 2005.

Retention of the EJRA was tested throughout by the Review Group against its potential effectiveness in an amended form in achieving the Aims, though it was admitted that those were framed 'to meet the statutory requirements'.² rather than expressly for the benefit of the University. It was noted nevertheless that 'it was not possible to determine a direct causal relationship between the EJRA and the achievement of the Aims'.³ The *Review* concluded that despite this lack of clear supporting evidence for the benefits claimed to justify it, it should continue, though in future affecting a more limited category of employees, and raising the forced retirement age to 70.

Although a great deal of effort went into the creation of the *Report* it was not published on the open web and remains quite difficult to access which is restricted (due to "Single Sign On") to registered Oxford readers. The *Gazette* of 21 July 2022 included details of the proposed changes to Statute XIV, 15 and gave notice that the meeting of Congregation on 18 October would include voting on these changes. The announcement was duly made in the *Gazettes* of 6 and 13 October, with a URL link in each to the details given on 21 July. The *Gazette* of 20 October announced that there had been no opposition and the Resolutions were therefore carried without debate and voting. (Statute XIV is not a King-in-Council Statute. Changes to those normally invite debate.) The detailed and comprehensive review and the continued retention

of the EJRA both were endorsed by Congregation by default, without discussion and barely noticed.

Interest and concern had been very different in the period five years earlier when Oxford had made the decision to shrink its EJRA a little.⁴ Three appeals to the University's Appeal Court, where the decision-maker is a judge or senior KC had, after some resistance, been published. Two had found in favour of the appellants. The first successful appellant, D.J. Galligan, wrote 'Goodbye to the EJRA' in the *Oxford Magazine* of Noughth Week, Hilary Term, 2015, setting out the findings of a former Appeal Court judge Dame Janet Smith. She made serious criticisms of the procedure, including that the extensions procedure simply allowed the University to pick and choose those it 'wishes to retain while requiring others to retire'. Stephen Goss, then Pro-Vice-Chancellor, added a note in the *Magazine* promising that there would be a speedy review, ahead of the comprehensive 5-year review of the EJRA already scheduled for 2016-7.

As a result, from 2015 the application process for an extension was changed. The Department and Division were no longer to be asked whether or not they supported an individual's application for extension, but were only to provide objective comment on certain aspects of it. There was to be no reference to the applicant's personal prestige, so as to avoid any suggestion of performance management. The only questions to be considered from September 2015 were the purpose of the extension and how far allowing it would impact on the Aims.

On 17 May 2016, a Congregation Resolution 'Good governance of the University in relation to the Administration of the EJRA scheme' was debated. The Resolution was rejected by Congregation (121:149) in May 2016 (*Gazette*, Supplement (1) 25 May, 2016). Another of the successful appellants, relying on Dame Janet Smith's findings, Peter Edwards, wrote on 'Experiencing the EJRA' in the *Magazine* of 8th week Trinity Term, 2016.

In February 2017, when the amendments to Statute XII were approved by the Privy Council, they included the removal of the right of resort to the Appeal Court in appeals about EJRA decisions. That immediately affected one appellant who was diverted mid-appeal to the provisions for a University Appeal Panel, under Council Regulations 1 of 2017 (18-26) and subsequently succeeded against the University in the Employment Appeal Tribunal in 2021.⁵

The findings of the '5-year' Review Group were duly published. They were debated in Congregation on 2 May 2017 under the heading 'Statute XIV: Employment of Academic and Support Staff by the University'. Irene Tracey spoke as Chair of the Review Group to stress its independence. 'We did NOT receive guidance as to what conclusions we should reach from Council or from anyone else' and the group consisted entirely of members of Congregation.

There soon followed two further meetings of Congregation on (1) a Topic for discussion: 'The future of the

EJRA at Oxford' and (2) an unsuccessful Congregation Resolution: 'That the EJRA in the University of Oxford should be abolished' (*Gazette* (Supplement) 24 May, 2017).

The considerably more low-key handling of the findings of the 10-year *Review* form a striking contrast with the high level of discussion on the subject at the time of the 5-year review. The earlier level of indignation appears to have subsided with the completion of various litigation and the loss of the Appeal Court as an avenue of recourse, with its significant and ultimately public judgments.

Cambridge questions the future of its EJRA

All this makes the current rising of indignation in Cambridge the more noteworthy in that it is taking place after ten years not five. Cambridge's provision for appeal and application for extension is quite different than Oxford's. An appellant must write to the Director of Human Resources within fourteen days of being refused a request to continue in employment; the Council appoints an Appeal Committee consisting of a Chair and two members of the Regent House. The appellant and the Head of Department or Division may address it. It may allow or dismiss the appeal and its decision is final. There is no published record of outcomes or the reasoning relied on in arriving at them.

There had been a notional *Review* of Cambridge's EJRA in 2015-6, with results reported to the Council and General Board, though not offered to the Regent House in a *Report* for Discussion. Now Cambridge is beginning to question its own EJRA seriously, beginning with a memorable Discussion of the Senate on 'Forced Retirement', held on 24 January, which attracted 28 speakers.⁶ This had been called as a Topic of Concern with well over 50 signatories.⁷ There were 28 speakers, all but five calling for the abolition or radical amendment of the Cambridge EJRA.⁸ Some academic-related staff (for example in computing) spoke, but no administrators in the UAS (though also holders of University Offices). UCU made only a limited contribution. The SSO protection of the Oxford Review meant that it was difficult for Cambridge staff to access it and to benefit from the detailed evidence and arguments it contained.

The Oxford EJRA *Review* gave a good deal of space to the effect of the EJRA on improving diversity. That was incidental in the Cambridge Discussion. There were no speakers seeking to make a point from the angle of a minority. Women speakers in the Cambridge Discussion were few; they emphasised the disadvantage to women who had lost research years to child-rearing. One speaker thought the forcibly retired might in fact just be pleased to be able to spend more time with their grandchildren or take up a new hobby. A speaker from the Law Faculty outlined the advantages of retirement ('come on in the water's lovely') for those not in need of grants to enable them to continue their research.

A speaker seeking retention of the EJRA made a point touching on a significant contrast with Oxford's system of conjoint appointments. He pointed out the risk that if there was no enforced retirement:

'in Cambridge, a senior [University Teaching Officer] who steps down from (or never had) College teaching duties can in princi-

ple draw a full salary for doing a couple of lecture courses a year, a certain amount of examining, and a few other bits and pieces. It may help to appear to do research, but that is not the same as actually doing it, and the difference may go undetected or several years – even by the staff member in question.'

This is in fact true. The *Statutes and Ordinances* [*Special Ordinance C (ix) (5)*] require academics up to Grade 9 to give only 'not less than thirty hours' lectures a year' or 'an equivalent amount of teaching' approved by the General Board' substituted. Special Ordinance C (vii) Part C, 5 imposes limits on College teaching by University Officers.

The speakers were, in many cases, describing their personal experiences rather than analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the procedure. Of the speakers urging change, those in the sciences had tales to tell of the consequences to their own research of the fact that they could not apply for a five-year grant after the age of 62. They were leading research groups which were providing jobs for the young. Several historians spoke, pointing out that a historian's research might be 'cumulative' and was likely to result in significant publications in later years, certainly beyond the age of 67, but it seems clear that those who did not need grants were less affected by forced retirement.

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor for University Community and Engagement made one of the speeches. He noted that an EJRA Review had been planned for 2019-20 but postponed. He promised that the HR Committee would 'propose a Retirement Policy and EJRA Review Group', to be 'academic-led'. Its terms of reference and membership would, he said, be published by the end of this Term and reporting first to the Council and General Board. Time will tell how long this takes, but the visibility of this Cambridge review might well reawaken concerns in Oxford. Should Cambridge abandon its EJRA Oxford may feel considerable pressure to think again.

Oxford's forthcoming general employee review and Cambridge's Workforce Policy

The career-planning problems of the many contract and short-term employees in universities are well known. It is important that the fixed-term nature of the contracts of those subject to the EJRA in both universities are not lost sight of, for those subject to an EJRA in either university have in effect, under the EJRA, only 'fixed-term' contracts. In Cambridge only University Officers, commonly appointed as Lecturers, are subject to the EJRA. Throughout their careers the holders of these Offices have the considerable protections of the University's Statute C,⁹ but they face forced retirement at 67.

In her Oration at her Admission ceremony on 10 January 2023 Oxford's incoming Vice-Chancellor promised that she would 'immediately commission an independent analysis of all aspects of pay and conditions for all our staff – academic and non-academic', to report directly to her and the Council 'and on which we can act'.¹⁰ Job security is a growing concern for many academics as more are appointed with fixed-term rather than open-ended or permanent contracts and that will no doubt form a significant 'aspect' of this analysis. Oxford now faces the additional challenge of an Employment Tribunal claim by two Creative Writing staff in Continuing Education reported in the press as insisting on comparability with Uber drivers.

One of the possibilities considered and rejected by the Oxford *Review* group was ‘the creation of more posts in order to create vacancies by means other than retirement’. That was deemed ‘impractical and unaffordable’.¹¹ Cambridge has recently been creating more posts by appointing to five-year fixed-term unestablished posts instead of University Offices for academics. The number of Offices is limited because of the University’s commitment to maintain an Office to be refilled by a new appointee when there is a vacancy. An unestablished academic post still carries no financial commitment beyond a term of, say, five years. Nor do these unestablished academics have the protections of Statute C.

However, this multiplication of unestablished posts has proved far from uncontroversial. Cambridge has recently tackled the task of categorising its fixed-term, casual and insecure employees as well as those ‘established’ in University Offices, with a *Workforce Policy* ‘which sets out the University’s position on engaging its workforce’ and ‘in recognition of the diversity of activity undertaken at the University’. The Policy ‘highlights the University’s commitment’ among other things ‘to providing job security and stability, whilst balancing the ongoing requirement for flexibility in resourcing’.¹² There also exists a set of *Guidelines* listing Cambridge’s categories of ‘established’ staff, in posts for which salaries are guaranteed by the University beyond the current individual postholder. These are academic ‘Research and Teaching’ (Grade 9 upwards) and ‘Teaching and Scholarship’ (teaching-only, Grade 6 upwards)¹³ and some categories of Research and Professional Services staff. All others are unestablished, and therefore have fixed-term end dates.

The *Workforce Policy* and the attempted rationalisation of academic employment categories has been the subject of exchange between Cambridge’s Board of Scrutiny and the Council. In its *Annual Report* this year the Board recommended speedy action to resolve concerns over inequitable treatment. The Board asked for a timetable for the ‘the reviews on casual workers and use of fixed-term contracts’. The Council promises that both will be completed in 2023, though the review of the increase of unestablished posts has repeatedly been postponed already.¹⁴

1. *Ten-year review of the EJRA: Review Group Report*, Review Group Report (May 2022), pp.14-5 and pp.20-21.
2. *Ten-year review of the EJRA: Review Group Report*, Review Group Report (May 2022), p.31.
3. *Ten-year review of the EJRA: Review Group Report*, Review Group Report (May 2022), p.21.
4. 5-year review, *Gazette*, 29 September, 2016.
5. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6151f054e90e077a3078f960/The_Chancellor_Masters_and_Scholars_of_The_University_of_Oxford_v_Professor_Paul_Ewart_EA-2020-000128-RN.pdf
6. Verbatim record, *Reporter*, 1 February.
7. *Reporter*, 7 December, 2022.
8. Verbatim record *Reporter*, 1 February.
9. <https://www.acptands.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/> Cambridge has also recently added Teaching and Scholarship, essentially ‘teaching-only’ posts for academic staff who are not expected to do research, though their introduction has not been smooth
10. <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2023-01-10-new-vice-chancellor-ready-fire-and-wire-university-oxford-and-world>.
11. *Ten-year review of the EJRA: Review Group Report*, Review Group Report (May 2022), p.20.
12. *Reporter*, 28 September 2022.
13. https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/workforce_policy_guidelines_v1.2_1_oct_2022.pdf
14. *Reporter*, 25 January.

Notes from Ivory Flats

ROBERT FOLEY

Institutions run on the memories of people

It is a truth universally acknowledged that memory declines with age. We all reach the age – if we're lucky – where recall becomes an increasingly hit and miss affair. Names tend to go first – I'm down to half a dozen names of people I went to school with, and a few more I was an undergraduate with. Worse, of course, are the people I met yesterday, and can't quite put the name to the face. Worst is when I have to introduce them to someone else. No, on second thoughts, worst is introducing someone I have known for years, and the name just does not come.

Less significant, even amusing, is the loss of poetry. I was educated in a distant world where one was expected to learn screeds of poetry. I met an old school friend – one of the one's I remember – the other day, and he said that at around the age of 13 he had a bet with his teacher that he could learn the whole of – ah!, forgotten the name of the poet, wait a minute – Macaulay's 'Horatius'. He lost with a mistake in the penultimate of seventy odd stanzas. I was never in that league, but I could certainly do 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more' from Shakespeare's Henry V with ease. What I have found, over the last decade, is that it has gradually gone away, line by line, from the bottom. I can still do as far as stiffening the sinews and summoning up the blood, but the rest is a blank. I suppose eventually it will just be 'once more'. That it is all there in Google rather than my head is something I am still pondering as a good thing or a bad thing.

But it is not just individuals who lose their memory. Institutions do as well. I suppose at 800 years and still aging, Cambridge might be forgiven for a bit of memory loss. Indeed, some memory loss may be no bad thing, or there may be complete stasis and an inability to adapt to changing environments. As John Maynard Smith pointed out years ago, it might be thought that the perfect biological systems would eliminate mutation rates (a form of memory loss), but in practice they permit what might be considered the balance between stability and retaining the potential for change. I have a concern that, in Cambridge at least, that balance is threatened.

Institutional memory comes in many forms. The most stable, tablets of stone form, are the University Statutes, which used to appear in formidable dark blue volumes each year. These are effectively the constitution of the University, and can only be changed via the Privy Council – and no doubt the King is a bit busy with his family and coronation at the moment to want too many such changes. The statutes are deliberately hard to change, to avoid whimsical shifts with each new wind of change. They are easily accessible online now, but, as Gillian Evans frequently points out in her speeches to Regent House, they are seldom read by anyone other than her. Their whiff of medievalism makes them seem remote from day-to-day life, rather than being the bedrock intended.

Below the Statutes are the Ordinances, and below these

the Regulations, each a more malleable form of governance. In a way, the history of University governance is like a game of snakes and ladders, where activities occasionally become more important and climb the ladder from Regulation to Ordinance to Statute, but in these rapidly changing times it is more likely that they land on a snake and slither down in the other direction. Indeed, for practical purposes many higher order rules have been downgraded to a lower level, so that decisions that formally might have required approval from Regent House – the ultimate governance of the University – may now be approved by Council or some other body. Whether this is the equivalent of the bonfire of EU regulations proposed by the current Government, to be replaced by ministerial decrees, is for others to decide.

These are the formal institutional memory of the University, but they represent only a small fraction of what we might think of, in cognitive science terms, as the working memory. This is the product of two inter-related elements. The first are the informal traditions that have evolved, the actual practices that are made up of the working rules and the moss of conventions that have grown over these – 'this is how it has always been done'. The second is the actual memory and involvement of the people who carry out the institutional activities of the University in whom these conventions reside. It is the latter who have shaped, maintained and potentially lost the former.

The first, the informal traditions, are common to all institutions from the family to the nation state. We are largely unaware of these until we stay with another family or visit another country. The first Christmas with the in-laws is always an eye-opener. You open presents in your pyjamas? We are always dressed and drinking prosecco. You go to midnight mass? We are on the fourth bottle of prosecco. And so it goes. Anyone trying to visit another country has to navigate the dilemmas of shake hands, one kiss, two kisses, three kisses, starting on the left, starting on the right, hugs, between men and women, between women, between men. And so it goes, usually even further. The same is true for any university, and Oxbridge is particularly rich in such conventions, some bizarre and unfathomable. I once offered to shake hands with an elderly colleague, and he said, no, we had already met this term, so it was unnecessary. And don't even try and think about the hidden rules of a college. None of these are formally written down, and certainly not punishable in the breach beyond a raised eyebrow, but they are essential to the sense of shared knowledge, experience and intent. The customs of the tribe, as it were.

These do not just relate to social niceties, but how committees work and decisions are made. In my college all decisions are formal votes; on my former Faculty Board, I don't recall a single vote, and, in its high disciplinary diversity, it was accepted that larger entities would not outvote smaller ones. In my former department, PhD applications were seen by all, but it was taken for granted that the supervisor would have a major if not the final say.

Once merged with another department and new appointments were made, this practice was seen with horror, and potential supervisors were excluded from the process (in the surprising name of conflict of interest). The clash of cultural traditions, old and new, was tectonic, but was not based on actual rules, but convention. I once challenged a Head of Department on the fact that a retiring colleague was involved in the selection of their successor, but when I took this to the central administration, I was told it was just a convention, and nothing could be done about its non-adherence.

However, these customs, norms, conventions are entirely dependent upon the informal institutional memory that resides in the individual academics, and it is not rocket science to work out that this is strongly correlated with length of service, and indeed educational experience. In my sub-discipline within a larger Department, now only two people have been in post longer than five years. And in the Department as a whole, only a small minority were undergraduates or graduates at Cambridge. Compare that with when I was an undergraduate, when all the lecturers and professors who taught me had been educated in some way or other, usually entirely, in Cambridge.

To return to the mutation rate model, that was a situation of coelacanth proportions, with a virtually non-existent mutation rate. Change was glacial, because no one really knew of any alternatives, or were particularly interested. Things just were. The broader and more diverse base now – not just educationally, but by gender and cultural background – is a much healthier situation. But, as readers of Ivory Flats know, there are always costs. Those costs are the loss of institutional memory. For a very successful university like Cambridge, this is potentially a very great cost, because essentially, in terms of developing excellent students at all levels and being among the top ranked research universities in the world, one must assume that the balance between change and stability embedded in the institutional memory was about right.

So what happens when institutional memory loss sets in? Does it matter? The memory is institutional knowledge, and with knowledge comes the power to do things, to do them efficiently, and indeed, the power to resist doing things as well. As fewer and fewer of the academic staff have the long-term knowledge, the wheel can be endlessly reinvented, often becoming more and more oval in the process. Not knowing the unwritten customs of the tribe results in a loss of confidence, and an inability to challenge and shape and change the institution from below, and to resist change from above. Fear of not knowing the unwritten customs must at least be partly responsible for the reluctance of academics to engage with Regent House. Cambridge always goes on about being a bottom-up university, but with each year this becomes less and less true as the memories are lost at the bottom, and confidence is replaced by ‘am I allowed?’.

There is another risk as well. If people do not know the unwritten rules, there is an irresistible temptation to write them down. These do not have the power of the statutes, ordinances and regulations, but websites are now replete with guidelines, best practice, steps to follow, boxes to check. The sources and authorities of these are usually invisible, but they trump the unwritten customs for being written down. And, of course, they come from above, not from below, and if academic tenure is short, administrative tenure is likely to be shorter still, and institutional memory shallow. So, what better than to get the memory off the shelf from somewhere else.

Cultures – and Cambridge and Oxford are ancient cultures – die when they lose their memory, just as they die if they do not adapt and change. The balance of change and stability in the evolution of an institution, just as in organisms, can be fragile, and I think that fragility is all too real at the moment. Institutions are made of memories, work through their memories, and their memories reside in people. Widely shared institutional memory must be the basis for a genuine bottom-up university.

CONTENTS

No. 450 Fifth Week Hilary Term 2023

I am not a robot BEN BOLLIG, TIM HORDER	1	EJRA ROSS ANDERSON	10
Questioning AI	3	Memento Mori Solstitium CARMEN BUGAN	12
How intelligent is Artificial Intelligence? An exploration	5	Should Oxford keep its EJRA? G. R. EVANS	13
Reminders	8	Notes from Ivory Flats ROBERT FOLEY	16
Adynata* Orkney The old dance hall MO BROWNE	9		

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

Dr Linda Eggert is an Early Career Research Fellow in the Faculty of Philosophy and at the Institute for Ethics in AI, working on moral and political philosophy • Ross Anderson is Professor of Security Engineering at Cambridge • G.R. Evans was Professor of Medieval Theology and Intellectual History at Cambridge • Robert Foley is Leverhulme Professor Emeritus and Fellow of King's College, Cambridge